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"Under his guidance the Jews were wont to occupy themselves with the study of the *Kitâb al-dalâlat*: this is a work upon the principles of their religion by Ra'îs Mûsâ.<sup>1</sup> The Scheikh Shams al-dîn relates, in the name of our Scheikh 'Imâd al-dîn al Wâsitî, thus:—"I (Al-Wâsitî) came to him (Ibn Hûd) and begged him to undertake to guide me in spiritual things. He asked: "Upon which road? the Mosaic, the Christian, or the Mohammedan?"' At sunrise he turned towards the sun, and crossed himself."

He was a friend of the physician 'Aff 'Imrân, of the Scheikh Sa'îd al-Magrebî, and other learned men. When he died, the Kâdî Badr al-dîn b. Gamâ'a was the only one who read the burial service over his remains. He was buried on the declivity of Mount Kâsyûn (Damascus) in the year 697 of the Hegira (1297-8.)

The Scheikh Salâh al-dîn al-Safadî (1300-1363) relates the following concerning him:—"He was once asked by his pupil Sa'îd to show him the Creator of day: whereupon he took him by the hand, climbed on to the roof of a house, and stood half-a-day long, gazing at the sun. He used to walk to the Mosque with a fixed glance, as though he were absent-minded, with up-lifted finger, as it is wont to be raised at confession. Burning coals were oftèn placed in his hand when open, and he would close his hand out of mere distraction, recovering his senses only when the coal began to burn, upon which he would throw it away. People were in the habit of digging pits in his way: he was so abstracted and absent-minded that he did not notice them, and fell into these pits."

IGNAZ GOLDZIHNER.

*Budapest.*

### **The Sign given to King Ahaz (Isaiah vii. 10-17).**

It is not the purpose of this note to discuss the above-mentioned passage in detail, nor to settle the vexed question whether "the damsel" (הַעַלְמָה), of whom the prophet speaks, be a definite individual, or a general term applying to any woman who should bear a son at the time specified. My object is simply to elucidate the meaning here conveyed by the word אֵימָה, "a sign." It was long ago remarked by Gesenius that "a sign" does not necessarily imply anything miraculous, as is shown by such passages as 1 Sam. ii. 27-36. Yet even recent commentators have sometimes found it hard to believe that so ordinary an event as the birth of a child could be

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י וכאן ישתגל אליהוד עליה פי כתאב אלדלאלה והו מצנף פי אצול דינהם  
ללריים מופי :

described as "a sign" to the house of David, and have consequently argued that some supernatural, or at least very unusual, occurrence must here be intended. It may therefore be worth while to illustrate this passage of the Old Testament by citing a very similar passage from a Mohammedan source.

It was, as every one knows, a common belief among early Mohammedans that the coming of the Prophet had been foretold by certain favoured persons, and announced by various "signs" to the world at large. Some of these signs—for example, the spontaneous extinction of the sacred fire in the sanctuary of the Persians—were, of course, miraculous in the ordinary sense of the word. But among the non-miraculous signs there appears one which bears so striking a resemblance to the sign given by Isaiah to King Ahaz, that I venture to translate the story, as told by Ibn Hishām (ed. Wüstenfeld, p. 135), on the authority of his predecessor, Ibn Ishāk. Salama ibn Salāma, who fought at the battle of Badr, narrated as follows:—"We, the family of the Banū 'Abd-al-Ashhal, had a Jew living under our protection [at Medina]. One day he came forth from his house and stood still at the place where we were sitting. Now I, at that time, was one of the youngest of my family, and was reclining, wrapt in a striped cloak, in the court-yard. The Jew began to speak about the resurrection, the gathering [of the dead to judgment], the reckoning [with God], the balance [in which men's actions are to be weighed], about Paradise and Hell. All this he said to a people who were still heathens, worshipping idols, and not believing in any resurrection after death. To which they answered, "Nay, do you really think that this is so, that men will be gathered after their death to a world containing a Paradise and a Hell, and that they will be rewarded there for their deeds?" "Yes," said he, "by God! and if only I might escape from that Hell hereafter I would willingly have the largest oven in the house heated and then have myself put in and closed up there." "But," said they, "what is the *sign* of this?" "A prophet," he answered, "sent from that country yonder," pointing with his hand towards Mecca and Yemen. "But when," they asked, "do you think he will come?" Then he looked at me and said, "*If this boy reaches the full term of life, he will see him.*" And in fact before another day had passed God sent His Apostle to dwell among us, and we believed in him, whereas the Jew refused to do so from malice and envy. So we said to him, "What! Did you not tell us so-and-so about him?" "Yes," he replied, "but he is not the man?"

It is important to observe that in this story the word used for "sign" is *āyat*, the exact equivalent of the Hebrew אֵיט in Isaiah

vii. 11, 14. In both cases a prediction is uttered which is to be speedily fulfilled, and the speaker, by way of proof, points out a child in whose lifetime the event will take place. In Isaiah the child is still unborn, and the *terminus ad quem* is his arriving at years of discretion, whereas in the Arabian story the child is actually present, so that the *terminus* is placed later, namely at his reaching the normal age of man. In both stories therefore the main idea is the same. Nor is it a valid objection to say that in Ibn Hishām it is the coming prophet, not the boy Salama, who is described as a sign. Obviously the whole passage following on the demand for a sign must be taken together—that is, the sign that there is a future state consists in the coming of the prophet, and the sign that the prophet is really coming consists in the fact that Salama ibn Salāma will live to see him.

A. A. BEVAN.

**Elhanan, son of Shemariah ben Elhanan.**

DR. HARKAVY, in his learned edition of early *Responsa* (page 342), suggested that Shemariah, son of Elhanan is identical with the same who was made prisoner by Ibn Demahin and brought to Egypt, where he was redeemed and made one of the Chief Rabbis (see *Mediæval Jewish Chronicles*, I., p. 68). This suggestion will now become a reality by the fragment of a letter or a responsum, apparently addressed to Jacob [ben Nissim, at Kairowân]. It seems also to result from our mutilated text that Elhanan remained in Egypt after his father was called to Kairowân. The document we publish here is to be found in a MS. of the Bodleian Library, Hebrew e. 44, pp. 80 and 81. Whether this fragment is the original of the letter, we cannot say for certain, but the writing is of an early date (eleventh century).

אלוף ובהצלחת מעשיו ובתת חנו ובהגבר ידיו אשר חסדי יי האלה  
עמנו ועם כל ישרי כעל כל אשר גמלנו יי ורב טוב לבית ישראל אשר  
גמלם כרחמיו וכרוב חסדיו קראנו ונאמרה מאור זה הזרחת לנו אלהינו  
הגיהו מהודך נסה עליו אור פניך לא יבא ולא יאסף כי לאורו נלך חשך  
ובוא (sic) נראה אור והלכו גוים לאורו ומלכים לנגה זרחו מעין זה בקעת  
להשקות צמאים לרוות עייפים המשיכהו מאתך נוזלים מן לבנון לא יכזבו  
כי מעין ישועה הוא לשואבים נשתלחו מעיניו בנחלים בין הרים יהלכון  
ישקו כל הקרובים ישברו רחוקים צמאם עץ חיים זה נמעת בעמך אשר  
פריו יתן בעתו תנוב למאכל ועלהו (fol. 80a) לתרופה מאביו אוכל כל  
רעב תנוב כל עדנים מגד תבואות שמש מגד גרש ירחים מגד ארץ ומלואה